THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

ARTHUR H. GLEASON

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BY
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THE·PLIMPTON·PRESS
[W·D·O]
NORWOOD·MASS·U·S·A

TO
NORMAN HAPGOOD

WITHOUT WHOSE STEADY
ENCOURAGEMENT NO ONE OF THESE
PARAGRAPHS WOULD HAVE
BEEN WRITTEN

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

In a world mostly made up of busy strangers, hospitality to the newcomer is a charming trait. So, cordial thanks for a welcome to these wandering words are due the Editors of Collier's Weekly, the American Magazine, the Ladies' Home Journal, the Outlook and Good Housekeeping.

A. H. G.

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THE DAYS OF THE TRUCE OF GOD

THE LORD OF CHRISTMAS WEEK

MEN have long dreamed of the perfect ruler, some happy prince who shall love his people well, whose leadership shall be wise, gentle, and just. History is wistful with men's effort to find him — the hero, the strong man, the righteous ruler — and then to establish him in dominion over their broken lives and warring wills. Long ago they found Him. But all who find Him lose Him, though all have found Him fair. The eager dream came true, what time there issued out of Bethlehem the man of good-will, the lover of the race. Each year, for a handful of days, so brief, so swift to go, Lord Christ assumes the leadership. Each year we give Him Christmas Week,

permitting His will to prevail, His brooding spirit to rest upon the nations.

Toward that gentle interlude — the days of the Truce of God — men longingly look through the tale of the weary months. And when the brief term is ended, yearningly our thoughts turn back to that time when we were good together. His spirit is breathed through the pensive season, like faint music in the night. Strife, anger, tumult, and the hurry of the little days are banished. For our sad mood and lonely heart He brings a comfort. To His loving-kindness we yield ourselves, as tired children lay them down to rest. In His authority we find our peace. A while we dwell in that felicity. Touched with mortality, as is all earthly beauty, the rapid days glance by, and we have lost them while the welcome is still on our lips. He comes and He passes, because our hospitality is short of duration and we are troubled about many things. We crowd Him out for other guests less radiant. If His dominion over the hearts of men were more than a lovely episode, if He might but abide, it would be well with us.

THE PRINCE OF PEACE

ALL the old troublous questions of the origin and destination of the Galilee Carpenter have passed. All the medieval worriment in discriminating between human and divine has gone, all the puzzled inquiry into the miraculous. No longer is mankind stirred over the non-essential. Theories of Him fade away, dogmas on His nature lose their charm. His gentleness has conquered. His influence continues and widens. Slowly brightening, the Gleam that lighted Him spreads through the world. His spirit moves on the face of civilization and makes it kindlier every generation. The touch of His hand is on the grief-stricken. Nurse, physician, and nun are the messengers of His teaching. The vestal fires burned out, but never the fires of His spirit, which answer each other from mountain-top to mountain-top across the continents. And deep in the heart of the people they make family life sweeter

and ease the bitterness of failure and ignorance and all life's incompleteness. That wonder-working personality was never so potent as today — so insistent and tenderly sure. Under a thousand forms, creeds, and names, men serve Him. And however far we go in the conquest of nature, identifying the North Pole, climbing the sky, prying open electrical forces, diminishing sin, disease, war, poverty, ignorance — always in the advance will be that gracious figure of the Sinless One, who showed Love as the rule of life. One Perfect Man — ardent and gentle — the race will never tire of Him.

THE MOOD OF THE SON OF MAN

THE world is not wishful to hear the cry of our bitter rebellion, because we go heavy-footed down saddened ways. It is weary for the touch of a comforter. And One came, enfolding ingratitude and hate with mercy, as the night of immense distances flows round the overheated earth. He reaches each human heart touched by injustice and the grayness of the common lot. He heals the loneliness of great cities, the pang and hurt of life. His holiness is not estranged by any sin of ours. His patient forgiving outlasts time and all our failing. Our frets and unsuccess are lulled in his tranquillity. The lowly are in him enlarged, for he reveals fresh values in humble folk and common things.

To those in sorrow he has been the incomparable and gentle friend. Fondly we had longed for a well-remembered face and for a voice that was very sweet in our ears.

We were wistful for the patter of eager little feet that shall never run our way again, for the fresh beauty of a youth who has gone a longer quest than the earthly pilgrimage. To all of us disconsolate amongst our unforgotten dead, that humble advent in Bethlehem brought comforting. Sharpness of sorrow is eased by his consoling, and even for loss irreparable he gives the calm of a final hope. By our most hidden grief he is pierced, for there is a nearer way yet to his heart than by spear-thrust.

THE CHRISTMAS YET TO BE

THE one remains. The many change and pass. Christmas is undying. The notions of it alter with climate and Zeitgeist. Once a barbaric festival, full of gladness and roughness, the long northern nights and black forests shaped it to a thing of fairies and saints, where horse-play jostled religion. Grotesque as a gargoyle, it was worshipful and rowdy. Then came the happier days of civilization, when the family celebration was all in all. It became a Feast of Lights — a white flame on a green background.

We of today would lose no twilight touch of the ancient mystery, but already we suffer together and labor in a richer fellowship than in any of the blind eons of our upcoming. So to our festival we would invite in all the human family. Christmas is coming, but never yet has it come. It has not fully dawned while still a child's careless laughter is drowned in the

dreary noise of machines, while yet a maiden, who might be pondering her mercies, is weary in her young days with the heaviness of shame and anxious toil, while yet a mother must needs turn from the child at her breast and the children at the knee. So to our Christmas we will little by little let in a richer music, like a golden-tongued bell turning from a minor to a song of the ultimate triumph.

II

OVER THE THRESHOLD

A DESIRE FOR THE NEW YEAR

IN the year that is beginning —

May we keep our reverence unimpaired for the humble-minded and those who have suffered much —

And our humor alert for our own mistakes, our self-pity, and self-sufficiency, and not at any time wreak it upon the aged, the crippled, the obscure.

May we guard childhood as a gentle and a sacred flame —

Honor age, however infirm and petulant, because it has gone a long way on the same road that bruises our feet —

And ever seek to prolong the brief moment of joy as it visits children and lovers.

May we have the grace —

To rejoice in the flow of life as it moves through men from generation to generation —

And to be purified by the mystery in which we dwell — the night silence and the wonder of our inner life.

May we gain wisdom to know that humanity is vaster than any creed of its devising, any church of its upbuilding, any religion of its shaping.

May we look upon the widespread spectacle of human suffering —

And having endured to look upon it, may we know our single life — seemingly so unique — as a drop of that infinite sea.

And when it comes our time to learn that in this earthly life we shall not long dwell with happiness or with success, may we clear our spirit of bitterness and envy, and in calm strength continue at the work.

III

THE PROCESSION OF THE SEASONS

THE VANISHING WINTER

THE sacred rage of the winter is at an end, and its fury has dwindled and blended into these open and rejoicing days. Long we have been aliens in the harshness, lacking a citizenship in those rigors and biting draughts. Now again we are at home in life, and draw near the heart of being.

Nature reveals her intimacies to us. As we go strolling down the lanes, bright-faced random weeds lay bare for us their wayside beauty. Frost-bitten starlings and chickadees are sunned from their gaunt forlornness. Prowling village cats put off their starved cathood and recover a sleek prosperity. No longer up out of the well comes the bucket edged with splinters of ice, to chill the teeth and cut the tongue. The barnyard, lately wiped clean of life by stabbing nor'westers, is full of inhabitants in motion, and finds again its various voice: a cackle, a mellow mooing, and the

scratching, pawing, rooting of reawakened life.

The breath of man ceases to be visible, but his spirit is more in evidence. Quenched by the cold, he went slinking and shrunken under a darkened sky. The shivering wastrels, who have looked so drear on wind-swept benches and flattened against blank walls, are restored to lazy comfort. No more with pinched aching fingers does the newsboy count out chilly coppers.

Yonder in the harbor, ice-locked schooners are melted into their moorings, and "put-put" boats, sprawling stiffly on their back, like overturned turtles on the beach, are released for darting errands down the bay. The immense acreage of the ocean, which but yesterday was flashing back bleak light in unbearable brilliance, absorbs a kindly warmth from on high.

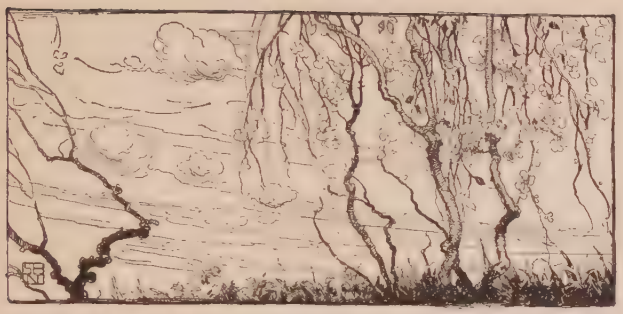
WHEN THE WATERS ARE RELEASED

WE rejoice in the many voices of the waters released, in the hidden fires of the violet, and the birds who are filling the sky and air with their sweet jargoning. Like the leader of an orchestra, whose numbers are as the sands of all the seas, whose members are every tuneful thing in the forests of the world, the Earth Mother signals attention. She raises her rod of power and, at the imperial gesture, releases creation's music.

Nature's infinite gift of renewal with each revolving year is a heartening fact in a troubled universe. In our clear-eyed moments we know that the death of our well-beloved is an irreparable thing, that daily routine breaks the eager spirit with which we once saluted the world, that sadness overlays the human adventure, like mist on the summer fields. All this we know and more. Each year adds to the sum of that

knowing. Nature is one with us in the experience of suffering. She shares the curse with man. Failure, futility, and death, sterile times full of pain and darkness — she too knows them well, the elements of our distress.

But she holds the master-word. Deeper than their decay, she strikes with her word of arousal. The thing created dies, but the spirit moves again, and a new and better thing has risen in its place. She fills the earth with her resurrections. She touches the tiny multitudinous seeds with life. Mightily she moves upon the face of the mountains till they break into answering green.



THE SPRING RESURRECTION

FROM winter, which pens us in offices and binds us to routine, we break forth to open spring days and wide country, to freedom when the heart swells, and life seems for a brief season as if it might be lived in the great stride and manner that glorify our dreams. For most of our days we have been living under a cloud. Never ceasing is our sense of insecurity, the dread of a sharp blow or diffused misfortune impending, that rides life like an Old Man of the Sea. How to drown out the sense of pain and sadness that inheres in the days as they pass is, however unconsciously, the attempt of all men.

"What shall we do to be saved?" is the

age-long cry of the race — saved from ourselves, cramping routine, futility of striving, success that breaks in the fingers — saved from foreknowledge of death. Now are granted us good hours, golden weather in choice havens, before we beat back to open sea again — to the groaning of cordage, smell of bilge-water, and heaving of the weary ship.

EARLY SUMMER

IN rivers, bays, and the running brooks the boys are beginning the daily swim. Examination time is hard by, and you can see the scared scholars almost everywhere, under shady trees and curled up on the piazza. If they are just "kiddies," you will hear them scratching away at "sums" with a stubby pencil. But the children of a larger growth are tightly gripping a dark brown book in the hand and trot-trot-trotting through the Mantuan hexameters, or "J. Cæsar and his Gallic scraps, which made him lord of other chaps." Inside the city walls the the children are screaming up and down the smelly asphalt streets.

Out beyond the region of clanging trolley-cars and steel-clad skyscrapers, the morning sunlight lies rich and heavy on the green grass, and all through the day till milking-time the cattle are placid in the meadows or knee-deep in the cool mud of scummy ponds, where turtles slide in and out and bullfrogs plump down on a high dive at the approach of undesirable citizens. When the day is quite done and the farm-hands are cutting across lots after chores, sometimes you can hear the mellow lin-lan-lone of evening bells drifting in across the lush green intervales from over the purple rim of the hills. Silently, one by one, the loveliest days of the year — the days of the early summer — are passing.

SEPTEMBER

NOW is the season of glowing orchards and tragic sunsets. All the work of the year is summed up in laden wagons and in barns that are stacked as high as the swallow's nest. The ceaseless effort of the twelvemonth suddenly finds rich expression, like a full-toned clock striking the hour. It is a season of contentment after work, with the quality of all perfect art — the quality of melancholy.

ALONG AN AUTUMN ROAD

THE leaves of trees and roadside bushes sag with their coating of smirch beaten up in dust spray by horses' hoofs and pounding motor-cars. The weary foliage has suffered a bombardment from the heat of a hundred summer days, and it hangs its dejected head. Long hours of pitiless sun and stampeding traffic have quenched the early fervor and wilted all the cool green promise of May mornings and gentle dews. But of a sudden what was parched and tired reveals a capacity for passionate beauty. The life force is ready with another renewal. That draggled veil of grime upon the undergrowth and forests is lifted, and drooping trees are

sprinkled with the radiance of the sunset. Dust-splattered wayside tangles leap into glow; lifeless growths are touched with splendor. The enkindling finger of Autumn has anointed the leaves with flame. Lustrous colors of the evening sky are let down upon hillside and highway, and the glistering garments of a transfiguration are wrapped around the earth-worn fronds.

WHEN MEN GIVE THANKS

ROASTED chestnuts, succulent turkey, the tawny pumpkin pie, and the swollen larder are playful symbols of the holy day, which bids defiance to oncoming winter. Men make them a fire and heap the table and gather their friends that they may voice their unconcern for the sullen months just ahead. Thanksgiving Day is the stirrup-cup to the long journey. We rejoice that we may rise and march again. Thanksgiving Day is the scarlet banner that we throw out to the November winds. We accept the challenge of winter, the rigors of unlovely climate, the gathering of snowdrifts. Frozen and wind-whipped and driven to cover, we make of man's natural enemies the orchestral accompaniment to his banqueting, and listen to the north wind driving down the street as to stringed instruments — a lullaby of gray wolves. Man tunes him a chorus from the

implacable elements in his own destiny. He rears an altar to the powers that flay him, sacrifices strange birds and beasts to his unruly fate, and drinks to the everlasting memory of his agony.

IV

THE COMING RACE

LINCOLN

WHEN the sons of men go forth to war they have never lacked their leader. For sailing the unplumbed sea and daring the rim of the world there are gentlemen a-plenty to take the trail. Great captains have there been for all these moods of man, adventurous, militant, intrepid. But in man's deepest need he goes unled and disconsolate. He craves some great companion who is acquainted with his grief. Deeper than his stern courage and adventurous quest lies his immemorial heartache, the price he pays for being finer than his imperfect world, larger than his destiny, more sensitive than his environment. He suffers because all that is excellent in him is troubled with the human spectacle, the almost universal sadness of things, the injustice done his mates.

Once and again in history have men felt themselves in a presence luminous with pity

and love, who answered this cry of their being. One of them was the man whom our country knew in its anguish. In him once more had the heart that lies hidden behind this vain show of things released its infinite yearning into the world of men. Once more had something out of the mystery so loved the world.

He came to the common folk. He is of us, by that strange guise, marred face, untutored way. He suffered even as we from the scorn of the proud, the sudden blows of fate, the silent wear of time and chance. He overspread a continent with his pity. Men became strong to endure, for love lay waiting at the end, nor were they hopeless in defeat when mercy enfolded their striving.

One more such man and we throw off hate and base desire and create a world that would make that lonely heart at home.

MARK TWAIN

HAPPY among creative artists is the humorist. He strikes as deeply into life as his neglected brothers who deal in pain and tragedy. But he alone carries the people with him. They are immediately receptive to his tidings of great joy. Poets, painters, sculptors, musicians do not fit snugly into the structure of the universe.

Then comes the humorist. With a vision of life as full-orbed as that rendered through the lyric voice or the color-sense, and an interpretation of pain and failure as searching as that of the prophets, he roars out his truths to the applause of his hearers. Revelers halt the chorus for him to insert his mirthful strophe, and the saints delay the rite to catch his casual whisper. His visits to this stricken planet are never ill-timed. Dante ate bitter bread where Aristophanes would have won enthusiastic banquets. Kindly is the fate of Rabelais,

Chaucer, Dickens — to be both glorious and happy — to reveal truth and gain welcome.

Only at the humorist's death is there sadness because of him. The more he made them merry, the richer the grief. And there are few peoples today on the earth where there is no sense of loss because Mark Twain died.

THE SCHOLAR

IT is a just and kindly system that cares for scholars when they are old and tired. It is good that long-enduring service should be honored — witness the well-loved friend of many hundreds of Yale undergraduates, Henry A. Beers, now made Senior Faculty Professor. This leaves him free at last for the writing which he has always loved, and which, for the most part, he has had to defer under the hot press of work. The memorial of such a man is in the affection and the disciplined thought of generations of pupils. A group year by year listened to his words, because they then seemed, and still seem, wise and sane and moving. Ten years away, twenty years, and still his quiet voice is penetrating. He has the sweetness, the low, sad, chastened mood of one who has known the fulness of sorrow and experience and gallant hopes struck down, but from these he has learned nothing but sympathy and cheer for the

bright youths who start out eagerly on the same long road. The quality of his phrases, the dignity of his judgments, his affectionate and detailed knowledge of the young men for whom he cared — these are for abiding memory in the many whom his forty years of service have prepared. It would be comforting to know that such a loyal, modest worker is aware of how gratefully he is remembered by widely scattered hundreds.

THE POET

IN "Helen" and "Israfel" we have Poe the sane and undying. Pressed upon by unlovely life, scorning the mob and all the brute accompaniments of democracy, thwarted and dispirited, he did what the hunted deer will do when cornered by the hounds. He jumped clear. Hating his surroundings, spurning the ground, he flew straight up from geographical and racial limitations and sang a song that Israfel or Moses and the Lamb could have sung in any clime at any age. Only two things are needed for that music — only two — wings and the golden throat. There is the hint in him of glorious galleys, golden galleys, argosies sunk in the unplumbed acres of mid-sea, the dance of the stars at midnight, the radiant pour of the full moon, the romance of the upper air, lawns bathed in dew and beating back the waves of the infinite distances. He was riming sheer unrelated beauty. He imagined himself free

of ugly local life, cruel haste, fever and thirst, and found singing robes and a welcome in the gardens that hang clear of the temporal world. There is no space, no time in his verse. But in cutting loose from the local he did not reach the universal. He had no love for troubled men, no instrument for the low, sad music of humanity. It was the cry of a lonely man, remote from the comforts of the world's loves. All the strings went untouched save the one string of a solitary nature questing beauty. What he reached is enough, although barely enough, to give him immortality. It is the sobbing note of the God-forsaken.

THE SKY-CHAUFFEUR

ANYONE who knows him feels that he has chosen his road once for all. There is no fear nor hesitation in him. To watch him stride out from his hangar to his monoplane is to see a man who believes that this next flight is to be the best ever dared. For him the earth is newly made every morning. Here is no man born late into a stale world of monotony, but one for whom life is an adventure. He acknowledges no limits to his daring. Nothing is too high nor too swift for him to hurl itself at.

Up over skyscrapers, which would spit him, he floats at peace, higher than some of the clouds. Out over lake and ocean he shoots like a departing arrow, or a carrier pigeon homing it in level flight.

Danger wears for him a bright and eager face, and he always goes out to meet her smiling, like a boy breaking into some fresh woodland trail. In an age when we are

abolishing pain and devising many forms of soft and easy living, so that we may move on cushion tires from the cradle to the grave, it is something to find a man who has no fear to die. Death has no sting, no bitterness for him, no victory over him. He has the same personal beauty, the same touch of boyish audacity, which have made the Greeks a legend for two thousand years. In his memory there should be little but gladness that a people have revealed to them for a handful of months a spirit so blithe and intrepid.

THE REFORMER

YOU cannot make him more lonely than always he has been. Again and yet again, men will ask him to cease being true to type for a little while, to give them a rest from his intensity, his fierce handling of the sore spots in human consciousness. But he gives them no rest. He has no gentler speeches, no playful interludes. He has driven himself hard at the flinty opposition, till he has become stern and solitary.

One thing he sees. One thing he does. Sometimes with over-emphasis, sometimes with heat and rage, sometimes wearily and unwisely, but still he drives on as if himself driven by overmastering command. Men grow tired of him, for the novelty of his onslaught soon stales, and they turn to a blither champion. If, for a little, they speak well of him, he quickly sets their teeth on edge by smiting their dearest tradition.

To carry through to the end an unflinching sturdy attack on privilege, on established power in any of its worldly manifestations, means that the fighter is scarred and broken before he has half finished his fight. The forces he has challenged will surely reach some personal weakness of his, and reveal an infirmity of temper or a youthful slip. At this they will direct their attack till they force from him the cry of pain. He too, like all mankind, is human and fails of perfection, and yet this is no final proof that the fight he is making is base. But they will proclaim him a warrior with a rusty blade. He invites bitter reprisal in making the fight at all.

It may be that the world shall read "his victory in his children's eyes," but he will not live to see that day. What he will live to see is more hate, more scorn. Sometimes he will wonder if all the anxious striving is quite worth while. He will wonder if the long future is a safe custodian for the precious elements in his individual life, which might have gladdened his family and enriched his own career.

A FRIEND OF MEN

AS he passes, men rise for an instant to the highest level of their being and greet him from that good moment. Already for him it is a world of brothers, because he evokes a transient grace in them, the shy heart of each peering out unafraid. Seldom can he see the age-long dreariness of men and things, for there flashes back to him something lovely from the face of creation.

With the hands of his beseeching he reaches out toward men, and the yearning in his voice is more moving than music on the waters. He has given himself to the disinherited, and in a life of obloquy he finds peace. He answers the sorrow of us with the pain in his eyes, and out through the face of his anguish there shines that which we may not look upon without being humbled. One man cares like that because we suffer, so we come to him and take comfort.

He must believe that hidden in the depths of the darkest night there waits some great lover of the race, who will save bruised children and lead them in sacred procession to the land of their desire.

If we had not seen him and known him, we had doubted that such a man ever came among men.

V

IN MINOR KEY

IN SOMBER MOOD

WHEN first a man knows that he is to have poverty and obscurity for his portion through the years, sadness at home, and loneliness abroad among men, he is touched with dismay. He envies the light of heart and those whose high gifts win them freedom from monotony. Soon he learns that what other men have suffered he too must suffer and can endure. The lot of the race has included him, and he is one with weary multitudes.

For the results of man's labor are meager, his product imperfect. Sometimes he looks ahead with foreboding spirit and sees trouble and grief down the long vista. And yet it matters not how searching the forecast thrown on the future times. When he has trodden that shadowy road, and then looks back along the path where once he looked forward, he sees that what he feared came true, that he passed into the suffering which he had thought might be. Failure wraps

round his little effort, as the ocean encircles an island. Its rhythm beats ever on his crumbling shore.

Few among men were ever meant to have a place in the sunshine, to rejoice and dominate. Affliction and failure have been fed us from the beginning of years. Such is the past of the individual life with its span of unlighted years, and such the history of the race and all the races, with their blind, unrequited toil and servitude, their mutinies, their tyrannies, their final dissolution.

THE DOOR OF ESCAPE

THERE is a loneliness for each of us in which we veil our deeper self. It comes after wide prospects of sea and sky, at once enveloping and piercing us, like the gray wet mist on the coast of Maine. That loneliness of the little individual life as it takes its way through space and time is only to be eased by comradeship.

To save us from the ever-deepening silence, we need the society of those who set us free. It is good to share their shy confidences, to yield up our best thoughts, which come from far down with a wrench that hurts. For reticence grows with the silence it feeds upon. The only living part of us is that which flows and, moving, finds its way to the daylight out of the hidden tangles of its source. It is hard to reach over the frontier lines and bespeak another wanderer, but it is more bitter and sterile to live unuttered.

That we be not wholly banished to the realms of silence before our time, the dear Lord who loveth us has flavored life with a zestful trick. Male and female created he us, that we find freedom and release in converse each with other — converse that shall not be misunderstood when we babble of our uttermost hopes and dim desire.

That difference of sex conquers the shyness of likeness and the fear of misunderstanding. It is as if a pontoon bridge were flung out over the estranging sea that ever flows between. What a man cannot say to his dearest brother, who has tracked the wilderness by his side and sojourned with him in the house of death, he can tell to almost the first woman he meets. And many a woman who flits gaily or cynically on the surface meanings of things, as she sits with her sisters at talk, or goes utterly silent in their noisy company, finds her real voice and sweetly sober utterance with the man who is at one with her in the larger work of her days.

UNDAUNTED

THERE is a race of snub-nosed Turbit pigeons whose breeders sometimes intensify the type by thumbing the beak back into the skull while the bird is still tiny and has no voice to say its agony.

And so one thinks of the stricken youth, the shop-girls, and mill children, working with diseased lungs and ruined organisms — in a dumb agony. They have had no voice to shape and cry out their hurt.

Yet the leaping, persistent spirit in man has poured through even these dreary obstacles and all the thwarting of life. This eager, unaccountable spirit has played and tumbled itself out over seared and sterile event. Sternly and with unbroken front it has marched upon the spears and into the flames, against all lesser wisdom. In the time of sharp pain from sudden accident and wasting disease, it bubbles up in gladness or diffuses in long Stoic endurance. It dances in the house of defeat.

It comes from afar and, unjustified, flirts with disaster and misery. It surprises itself in new uncouth races, when the ancient established peoples have lost the knack of giving it welcome.

Under its urge, what once seemed the hopeless adventure to man's despair reveals elements of conquest. Heavy-hearted and predestined in the youth of the world, he becomes more blithe and boyish with the ages. And as his petty planet cools to a cinder, almost it seems he will relight the central fires from his own consuming heart.

VI

THE WAY OF RELEASE

COMPENSATION

ONCE let the early years slip away and never does there steal back from the chambers of youth one whiff of the freshness that long blew tumultuously through heart and brain. The treacheries of the slow trailing years, sapping friendship till it forgets, delaying success till failure becomes a habit — such things as these reach at length our eagerness and quench it quite.

When once we penetrate the disguises and multiform illusions that cloak the game and see its naked central meaning, we do not again wholly trust any incident of its infinite variety. The best values rest on too perilous a chance — love carries with it, in its first fresh coming, the sadness of all the little partings and absences and of the final separation and bleak years.

One thing we learn. We learn to endure. And there enters a sense of mastery over events and time and the outer illusions

that change and pass. Some one thing we learn to do with surer skill and ever-growing power. And we come to see that the despair and loneliness have made themselves a part of the work itself and given it whatever cheer it carries for other men. The artist releases his creation, interpreting the little joys and little ills of life, encountered by his brother men, co-sufferers in the many-featured pilgrimage. It is of himself that he gives in that product, rendering a few faint echoes of beauty, so that, in far-distant places, some tired physician is refreshed, some obscure woman consoled.

If it took early years of bitterness to attain that sorrowful initiation and achieve a thing, so slight, perhaps, and little known, why other and more years of inner suffering must needs be overpast to reach the fuller tones and wider sweep.

Now that is the price to be paid for the creation of something beautiful. Into one-self pass the discords and the roughness and hurt of life, and in loneliness those broken bits are worked into a fair and lovely harmony. It is that sense of a suffering

creator which interpenetrates the statue and the painting and the poem till our eyes are wet with tears. It gives the poignancy of a sword-thrust to the portraits of beautiful women. In the gentle curve of arm and cheek the painter has suggested the descending cycle, the grace that is perishable, like music sinking toward the final silence.

CREATION

THERE is a region within every one of us, a deep lake of peace, out from which flows all that is excellent in our work and striving. Up from it well, if we are music-makers, the harmonies and the binding together of sweet sounds. It is the home of poetry, of the long thoughts of youth, of the golden treasuries of the arts. It is almost the only thing in life that does not lie within the reach of the will. We can quicken our activities, hasten our step, enlarge our muscles, and increase our knowledge, but the creative mood will not succumb to force or yet to gentle wooing. We can wrestle with the keyboard, scribble out the brittle sentences, finger the brush or the chisel, for a month of days — and out from all the worried moods and writhing not one curve of beauty nor any single loveliness of sound will come. Then on a haphazard day, when rapid light is on the face of the waters, or on some evening full

of desire, all that has been a vagueness and a struggle of a sudden takes on shape and clothes itself in melody. On the wings of its flight we seem to climb out of space and out of time. In effectual strokes the dream comes true. Rhythm enters where lately there was discord. Then the rapture fades, and the cold day strikes, and we are returned again to levels of the uninspired.

HAPPINESS

ONE of the world's great cities has a resort, a Hall of Joy, which is thronged through the evenings of each year. It is here that travelers sojourn to "see life," to taste experience, which they feel their meager workaday world is powerless to supply. Desiring to miss nothing that is human this side the grave, they turn their feet in troops to the doorway of this resort, a dance hall, vaudeville stage, and saloon. Men come from far to see this thing, for the precious chance of swinging in on the rhythm of that gaiety.

Tired musicians at thirty dollars a week make loud music on drums, pianos, and violins. A jaded girl in their midst sings, while the blear-eyed waiters pour out four-cent beer from bottles that cost the revelers a quarter of a dollar apiece. The singer, who shuffles a dance as she forces out the throaty notes, wears a cross of gold upon her throat. Swaying, the cross catches the

light as she passes a contribution wallet for ten-cent offerings from the indifferent audience. A strong-arm man at the door ushers in a band of anemic boys in flannel shirts. The feeble electric fans are powerless to create air currents in the atmospheric deadness.

In that sodden place the guests do not so much as touch the garment's hem of the fleet spirit they are trailing. They find satiety when vibrancy and life more abundant are not far from any one of them. Perhaps in their own back yard in the home town a child is laughing at play. And it may be that not very far from their hearth there sits some loyal woman, whose freshness of feeling and eager responsiveness of mood will outlast time.

FORGIVENESS

A NEWSPAPER writer promised to send his account of an interview to the man who spoke the words. In the rush of getting the "story" to press, of which the interview was a one-twentieth part, the writer forgot his promise and published the interview uncorrected and unread. Portland's ex-sheriff, when he next met the reporter, said that only twice in his life had he been so tricked on a journalist's pledge. The scribe deserved and received that rebuke from the ex-sheriff, but the terms of it were so final, so beyond the reach of forgiveness, as to make the journalist resolve that for himself he would try no longer to pass final judgment on other men because of single blunders and sins, no matter how flagrant and annoying the particular offense might be. He knew that, in spite of regrettable exceptions, his own effort in the main had been for ten years toward honorable dealing, and yet he had

slipped and slipped hard, so that he seemed to Portland's clever and attractive politician little else than a promise breaker. Indeed, he was that in the single incident which concerned both men. But the tendency and struggle of a life have a right to overbalance shameful lapses. The quality of mercy has more of truthful estimate in it than salient criticism, based on fatuous single instances.

BROTHERHOOD

AS you walk along a country lane in the summer time after twilight, you will hear a low crackling of tiny twigs, the snap of dry leaves. All through the tangle there runs a rustling of living things, the little woods creatures out for the evening on warpath or fodder-hunt or lover's lane. These roamers of the night go out to seek their loves, just like human folk, by beach and palisade and park and hill. That stir and gentle motion of sentient life, flowing through the undergrowth, is laden with some of the same consciousness that beats through our brains, five feet higher off the ground. It roams on the same quests as urge us out under the stars. There is an unguessed companionship and brotherhood among all forms of conscious life, which as yet in dim glimpses we only surmise.

BY THE RIVER ANDROSCOGGIN

WE were walking recently for many miles at a stretch, side by side with the Androscoggin River, that noisy and restless stream. It chatters over the stones in its bed; it is torn into foam at every winding; all its surface is overlaid with ripples; its music is little else than babbling. But underneath the turbulence there pulls one steady purpose, drawing to an unseen and distant place. There the little wayward waters lose themselves in the beat of a stately rhythm, where the tides march up and down. Lying in the stillness of Gilead, after a day by that aimless tumult with its veiled purpose, one is seized by the time-worn figure. Just so the years of our life go by, gliding and descending, as they move to the sea. Their haste and seething are merged in immensity, their petulance hushed in serenity, their littleness woven

into calm. There the depths lie imperturbable, under the winds that fret. In the heave of that vastness we shall blend our feebler flow.

VII

WITH A STAR UPON THEIR FOREHEAD

THE MODERN GREEKS

A PESSIMISTIC Yale professor has said that if "you could take the twenty best formed and best looking women you can find today and stand them up beside a Grecian woman of old, the women of today would look like caricatures." Where has the good man been, that he talks so aimlessly? If he will ramble down to almost any bathing beach he will there find a little "inside" crowd of expert swimmers. Among them will be two or three young women who, if they forgot themselves to marble, could easily slip into the Louvre. Another adventure, fertile in observation, would be to gain entrance to one of the women's colleges in the time of an open-air play. Those gentle actresses will convert him.

The legend of fair women is passed on with undimmed faith. That tradition rekindles itself for each generation. We all have seen these rare ones, some for a sudden

look and then no more, and others seen often, yet as unattainable as if wide spaces divided us. Never will they perish from the earth. Each community has them, fair as any heathen goddess. Each large office has them, at whom clerks and shop-girls wonder. Never may you look at that race of beings without a sense of tears. Beauty is so perilous, so fleeting, that its presence saddens, like music with a dying fall. It is of a piece with youth itself. It makes radiant its possessor for a little and then vanishes. Lightly the beautiful ones step toward the hilltops, dip to the valleys, skim this vain show, and pass. They are a portion of that loveliness which now they make more lovely. They belong to all that springtime means, to the curve of the breaking wave, the ripple of wheat, and the evening light on happy fields.

PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN

BEAUTIFULLY Sainte-Beuve speaks of a certain woman as wearing a star upon her forehead. Of course, what he means is that above her moral zeal and tact, wit of words, and tenderness of heart, she had the final consecration of genius — that sublimation of personality which catches up all the pedestrian qualities into a white light and conquers with effortless immediacy. You meet a thousand people (all day and for many days you meet them) in the dreary office appointments, in clubs, on the street, in the haunts of the semi-civilized. Then comes one, shedding soft light, a beautiful stranger in the workaday turbulence, and straightway you forget what manner of men and women were all the rest. Such were the form and address of Shelley. Such was the youth of Tennyson.

In that choice company of high intelligences our own Jane Addams moves. She is not as one of the troubled doers of good.

They, too, have earnestness. They, too, live close to suffering. They move toward the cure. Long and accurately they write on the ills of our modern life. With her these things exist, but with a difference. She writes hardly a paragraph but is shot through with poetry. She ministers to her generation in daily act and large vision and in the pensive loveliness of her face, the ardent and prevailing spirit surmounting frailty. She is not Methodist nor Socialist; no cult owns her; no panacea dominates her. To her the races come for interpretation. She opens her life to the life of the world. The tides of her spirit are one with the hopes and fears of millions. The head is bowed and the eyes downcast because that intense personality has lost itself in the lives of the human family. She has seen the work of her hands surpass her dreams, but she carries behind it all, the knowledge of futility. In her weariness and loneliness she works, even as her peers in every land and time.

THE SWIMMER

LIKE a Rhine-maiden in the younger days of creation she plays about in the element she loves. She glides in and out of the waters, and weaves dissolving patterns, and leaves the wake of a slim and accomplished seal. With the faultless curve of her descent in diving, she cuts a placid pool and stirs but gentle ripples.

She is in the likeness of Greek sculpture — the long, flowing lines of vigor, the touch of austerity that clothes in chastity those forms of the ancient world. This water-creature entered on life with twisted limbs and feet inturning. Today she is worthy of being rendered in bronze, to give perennial cheer — a change achieved by way of the sea. Her curves and lovely straightness, the balance and poise and all the tender, glowing abundance of her, might have come unhindered from the same creative hand that shaped the lily and the crescent of the moon.

MOTHER'S DAY

IN a month of fair and upspringing days we give renewal to the ancient and eternal ties by a day set apart for the mothers. Once they, too, tasted of youth and found the moonlight haunting and the face of adventure a sweet torment. But they turned from ways of ease and accepted pain and rigor, that so they might serve the ongoing of the race. Lavishly they spent that early bloom upon the rude and lowly task. Their gentle hidden fragrances were breathed out on little wailing lives. Loving beyond all narrow measure, they have poured out their frail but long-enduring strength, like the Bethany spikenard, in costly sacrifice. To us, who else had gone weak and unbefriended, they were as a dike against the beating of an alien sea.

In mellow and kindly latitudes, or set in the wind-swept iron background of New England hills, always they revealed love glowing at the heart of life. For them the

early rebellions have long been blended into concord. Their spirit has found the serenity of the undisturbed haven. Ever the storms die away and solemnly the stars return.

ESTHER

I WAS twelve — she was half past eleven — and we had loved each other all summer. We hadn't owned up to it till the other day, and nothing had come of it yet. Today she was very winsome, and there was an added earnestness in my manner that must have told her I would not be put off any longer. We had stolen away from a piazza of unsympathetic adults and had wandered into the orchard. She was leaning against an apple-tree and was ruthlessly despoiling a daisy. "One I love, two I love, three I cast away —" and soon she had nothing left but the dull gold center. I grew impatient of the process and came and stood over her. At last she looked up and saw what it meant. She closed her eyes, put up her face, and met her fate with a brave smile. I remember we were afraid of each other for the rest of the afternoon.

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